DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 160 EA 025 766

AUTHOR Highett, Neville
TITLE Best Practices Statements for School and Systemic Development.
PUB DATE Jan 94
NOTE 20p.; Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (7th, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, January 3-6, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Foreign Countries; Program Effectiveness; Public Schools; *School Effectiveness; Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (New South Wales)

ABSTRACT

The Quality Assurance Directorate of the New South Wales (Australia) Department of School Education is developing a series of Best Practices descriptor statements to help define discussions on school development. A wide range of performance indicators are being discussed among educators worldwide. Reporting of performance indicators needs to be seen within the context of decentralized decision making. In Australian states and territories, schools are expected to get closer to their community but still implement systemic reforms of the state. Teacher effectiveness plays a large part in the accountability questions that arise from the conflict between devolution and localized decision making. Improving learning organizations depends on a common vision of education and an engaged staff. Performance indicators are an important part of assessing educational improvement, though they can often be misrepresented. The Quality Assurance Directorate is developing best practice descriptors in three dimensions of schooling: teaching and learning, school governance and management, and school leadership and culture. Best Practices indicators provide a framework to initiate and chart systemic progress. Accountability and policy planning and implementation can be aided by reporting these indicators publicly. (Contains 25 references.) (JPT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 160

BEST PRACTICES STATEMENTS FOR SCHOOL AND SYSTEMIC DEVELOPMENT

A paper presented at the Seventh Annual International Congress for School Effectiveness and School Improvement
Melbourne, Victoria
January 3–6, 1994

Neville Highett
Director, Program Evaluation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Highett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 025 766

NSW Department of School Education

ICSEI.931224

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST PRACTICES STATEMENTS FOR SCHOOL AND SYSTEMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Quality Assurance directorate of the New South Wales Department of School Education is developing a series of Best Practices descriptor statements. These collaboratively developed statements are intended to provide the parameters for discussion about ongoing school development. They will be used to negotiate the foci for reviews of individual schools, to provide a framework for recommending directions for school development and to gather data to analyse and report on system performance.

This paper begins by briefly examining the changing context within which schools are now operating. This includes the restructuring of systems and the changes in devolution of decision making and associated accountability.

The quality of teaching and learning is central to improved student outcomes and student perception of what constitutes quality is briefly examined. However, the production of change in classrooms and the development of learning organisations focussing on improved student outcomes is to no avail if it is not possible to report on educational outcomes to both the school community and the wider system.

The role of best practices descriptors for school review and systemic reporting of performance in the New South Wales Department of School Education is then outlined.

The context

As educators we are constantly receiving messages about the changes that are under way in the world of education. Education is a global business and the communication of ideas and information across cultural boundaries is rapid. There is an ever expanding network of international conferences and meetings. One merely has to look at business cards of educators to see the impact of electronic communications–an Email address is almost mandatory. Rapid transmission of ideas and information is now the norm.

As part of the information exchange, educators and politicians are discussing the outcomes of education systems. There is an ongoing exchange of information about educational performance and a range of indicators are being used to report performance at the student, school and system level. The reporting of performance needs to be seen in the context of devolving administrative structures and the resultant impact on accountability processes.

DEVOLUTION OF DECISION MAKING

Caldwell (1993) maintained that changes in governance and educational structures within the Australian states and territories are about decentralised decision making, not devolution. Schools are expected to get closer to their community, both in terms of satisfying local needs and in terms of accountability. However, they still belong to state systems and are responsible for the implementation of systemic priorities and policies. These priorities reflect government policies and are associated with the more hard nosed outcomes focus. There is increasing emphasis on accountability of educational institutions.

David Hart, writing in the Times Educational Supplement (TES) on December 17, 1993 stated that it is not enough to criticise government policies or to oppose league tables, "schools must prove their effectiveness. . . . No one would challenge the doctrine of accountability, it is clear that performance indicators can play a central role in providing information for parents, governors and the school community."

Accountability

There is an inherent tension between devolution and localising–decision making. The stress is between systemic and local accountability. Kogan (1986) identified three main accountabilities that apply in an educational context. Professional accountability, where the educator is responsible for the standard of their work to themselves and against standards commonly accepted and espoused by others within the profession; moral accountability of the educator to their primary clients whether they be students or parents; and contractual accountability, which is in a "strict sense to one's employers or political masters" (p27). Given the nature of change over recent years in the interaction between Ministers and their departments it could be seen that the latter measure of accountability is becoming dominant for certain sectors of education–principals and other administrators. Irrespective of the type of accountability, the quality of the teaching and learning processes is of paramount importance when considering the improvement of student outcomes.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recent research by Ainley Goldman and Reed (1990) and Rowe, Holmes-Smith and Hill (1993), ably demonstrated that the in–school differences between teachers are greater than the differences among schools in their effect on student outcomes. As part of the growing movement from inputs to outcomes focussed research, attention has not been directed to teacher effectiveness. Rowe et al. (1993) drew attention to this lack of research into teacher effectiveness and stated "those who actually 'deliver' the educational 'product' (curriculum and teaching practices) to the 'clients' (students) – have mostly been left out of the 'production–

function' equation of school effectiveness and school improvement calculations" (p18).

The National Schools Project (1993) [now renamed as the National Schools Network–Dec 1993] is being sponsored by unions and education departments throughout Australia and addresses this concern. Its focus is on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. It is an important collaborative venture in terms of increasing the knowledge of educators about effective teaching and learning structures and processes. The initiative recognises where resources need to be placed if successful change in student outcomes is to be achieved.

Major change can be produced within classrooms. The role of the principal in energising that change is crucial. Fullan (1991) reminded us that change never occurs without an advocate and those in senior positions can be the most powerful in this context. Those in senior positions combine access, internal authority, and the resources necessary to seek out external funds for a particular program or to obtain support. However, senior administrators can be an equally powerful force at blocking change. Teacher advocacy is therefore an important factor in the implementation of change. The challenge is to make this advocacy operational within a workforce that is aging and is innately conservative.

The changes that are occurring are producing a degree of competition between schools. This has positive aspects because as Osborne and Gaebler (1993) indicated that, "while most of us would prefer a comfortable monopoly, competition, drives us to embrace innovation and strive for excellence" (p. 79). The challenge is to ensure that the change processes are focussed on improving the learning outcomes for all students.

Student Perception of Quality Teaching

The research literature into what constitutes effective teaching offers insights into what we should strive for in the search for excellence (see Hosford, 1984 for an earlier but succinct summary). Students who talk to NSW Quality Assurance school review team members are quite certain about this matter. They consistently indicate that good teaching occurs when:

- there is no barrier between the student and teacher based on authority
- the expected learning outcomes are known
- discussion occurs about the information in text books, materials and notes being presented to the class; this is seen as assisting with the understanding of and finding relevance for the material presented
- a variety of presentation methods is used, including group work and hands–on activities
- the students respect the teacher and the teacher respects the students
- personal attention is given to individual students and students are allowed to learn from their mistakes
- classroom behaviour is controlled because disruptive students hinder other students' learning and this leads to dull and boring lessons
- all students are treated fairly.

Students in the sample being reported by Paine, Turner and Pryke (1992) indicated that good teachers:

- are fantastic human beings
- read what you write and point out the flaws
- tell you the reasons for your grades
- have boundless enthusiasm
- yearn for knowledge themselves and it catches on among students
- assign meaningful tasks, not busy work
- are authorities without being authoritarian
- have absolute control over the class
- are demanding of their students
- challenge students to perform to the best of their abilities. (p. 37)

The findings reported above are replicated by the Phelan, Davidson and Cao (1992) study. The students in their small sample wanted teachers who:

- demonstrated that they cared for their students
- allowed the personality of individual students to show through
- challenged students to succeed
- did not 'put down students'
- did not allow students to put fellow students down.

There is a degree of consistency in students' perceptions of their needs. However, those who speak to review team members indicate that they are not always having their needs met. The challenge is to address these issues within all classrooms. Changing teacher classroom performance is essential for improved student outcomes.

Changing Classroom Performance

Work by Lieberman and Miller (1984) clearly indicated that support and close collegial relationships are essential if teachers are to change their classroom practice. Mentoring has been shown to be effective for assisting less experienced colleagues establish and consolidate their operational practice. However, to change practices that are central to one's understanding of the teaching learning process takes a great deal of support. The quality of working relationships among teachers strongly influences implementation of such fundamental change (Fullan, 1991). Collegiality, trust, support to answer questions as they arise, learning on the job, getting results, job satisfaction and morale are all closely interrelated. Rosenholtz (1989) found that only 13 of the 78 schools studied could be classified as "learning enriched." Such schools provided powerful models of learning environments that stimulate continuous improvement.

The investigation of and fundamental change to school structures and classroom processes is the aim of the National Schools Network. The project has five main aims that participating schools are required to acknowledge.

1. Acceptance that the school has the primary responsibility for improving learning outcomes for students.

2. A commitment to greater participation of students in the learning process.
3. A willingness to examine current work practices in order to identify:
   – good practice, and
   – impediments to effective teaching and management of the teaching/learning process.
4. A willingness to develop and model participative workplace procedures.
5. An understanding and acceptance of the industrial rights and responsibilities of all parties. (National Schools Project, p.3)

This project provides a powerful forum to assist and publicise teacher and student views of their world and a process to identify and publicise strategies that have a positive effect on student learning.

Learning Organisations

Acceptance and commitment to a commonly held vision is a prerequisite to an effective and highly achieving organisation. School's which encourage staff reflection on the core business of teaching and learning are able to enhance commitment to the central vision of the school (Schon 1987).

From schools where staff engage in frequent and precise conversations about teaching practice, will emerge leaders (not necessarily correlated to hierarchical position) with an ability to "infuse the work of institutions with those meanings, and thus draw the allegiance of other members of the organisation towards those meanings and purpose" (Starratt, 1993, p. 63).

"Language cloaks power and has power" (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 204). The power in these cases (teachers talking about their work), is the power of active professionals mastering and continuously improving their craft. It impacts on the culture of the school and demonstrates to all the importance of the central purpose–improving learning outcomes for all students.

The best practices statements being developed by the Quality Assurance directorate will provide a focus for the development of a school vision. They are in themselves a vision of what is possible and define the parameters of what can be achieved. They provide a focus for the activities of school staff as they learn together and plan for the development of student learning outcomes within their school.

Factors that produce a learning organisation, advocated by Senge (1992) are:

- Systems thinking which implies understanding the system by contemplating the whole.
- Personal mastery which is the ability to " . . . consistently realise the results that matter most deeply . . ." (p. 7).
- Mental models that are ". . . deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 8).
- Building a shared vision.

- Team learning because team learning is the fundamental learning unit of modern organisation.

Meadows (1993) recounted the changes that followed when teachers in one "learning" elementary school agreed with the school accountability committee to have parents observe classroom practice. The teachers were initially apprehensive but irrespective of this, voted to undertake the project. The observations brought teachers and parents closer together and provided a "clearer picture of what we need to continue to do well and what we need to improve" (p. 34). The teachers and community members coalesced around what was important for them and the students.

For schools to be focussed and delivering desired outcomes, they must be aware of the expectations and perceptions of the school community. For this to occur dialogue must be ongoing.

Effective Schools

McGaw, Piper, Banks, & Evans (1992) have identified that Australians believe schools need to:

- stimulate students' intellectual development by setting high but realistic expectations for them
- provoke competition that involves pursuit of 'personal bests' through comparisons with one's own past performance rather than the performance of others
- develop students' personal and social skills
- help students' develop a sense of personal value and confidence in themselves to take with them to adult life.

It is one thing to know what the community expects from its schools, it is however, an entirely different matter to accurately report to the wider community about the achievements in a school system. Traditionally education systems have used a range of performance indicators to report to the wider community.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

School systems, individual schools and teachers recognise that they need to account for both the quality of their work in terms of processes undertaken and for the quality of the outcomes produced. As well as this there is the requirement to report and account for the efficient and effective use of ever scarcer public resources. Systems have used a range of indicators to report against these criteria but the focus and scope of what is reported has varied over time.

Performance Indicators: What can they tell us?

It is interesting to look at some of the commonly published indicators that are presented to the wider community about this time of the year in Australia. The daily

newspapers in Sydney almost reach a frenzied pitch when the Higher School Certificate results are released by the Board of Studies. The top 1000 students' results are reported and during the next few days the supposed performance of individual schools is analysed against the percentages and numbers of students that were in the top 1000. Odious and inaccurate comparisons are made between government schools and private schools, various systemic schools and individual private schools etc.

The same pitch is reached in Edmonton Journal, Canada, when the annual parent satisfaction survey results are released. Individual schools are compared and assumptions are made about the quality and nature of learning in those schools. Similarly, The TES reports the "league table" of school results. However, the TES of November 26, 1993, indicated that the first Further Education league tables published in England earlier that week were

> widely condemned as 'irrelevant,' 'misleading,' and an inadequate base for any future measure of college successes. Angry college principals were close to demanding the complete withdrawal of the tables because of gross inaccuracies in the figures (p.4).

Attitudes may be changing in terms of the relevance and importance of league tables as indicators of school performance. The TES now publishes advice for parents on how to interpret the tables and what information can be gained (TES, November 26, 1993, p.8). The advice given, stresses that "it is our view that taking the results without giving any indication as to the starting point of the raw material is not particularly helpful to parents." This is an opinion supported by educationalists and teacher unions.

However, daily newspapers have published other indicator information. It has included information about truancy, retention figures, and incidents of violence in schools. Various systemic reports and the National Report on Schooling in Australia publish information on enrolments, retention rates, per capita expenditure, pupil teacher ratios, and student characteristics.

The models of educational organisation that underpin the selection of the indicators to report on the outcomes have had an emphasis on input–process–outcomes orientation and have not been capable of differentiating between practice variables and the outcomes achieved. This is due in part to the complexity of the causal relationships between facets of school operations. Hence, traditionally in Australia, departmental annual reports and the National Report on Schooling have focussed on easily observable, collectable, administrative, and fiscal information.

Murnane (cited in Porter 1991) argued that "education indicators should focus exclusively upon school outputs. Oakes (1989) disagreed, suggesting that information on school context should also be provided" (p.13). Porter cited three reasons for an indicator system. First is the descriptive role where the nature of the product and the policy is defined. Second, indicators can define what is evaluated when monitoring the school system and third, indicators can provide explanatory information when desired outcomes are not reached. However, Oakes 1986 (cited

in Cuttance, 1991) indicated that there are five types of information that indicators must provide at the operational level.

- performance information in relation to the achievement of goals and objectives
- information on the features of the system that are most important in achieving particular goals and objectives
- policy–relevant information
- problem–oriented information
- information on central features of the system (p. 23)

Many schools already collect and use information to assist them in assessing how they are performing. What all schools need is relevant and reliable performance indicators which illustrate progress in achieving the outcomes stated in their development plans. There is of course a risk in placing undue reliance on the information that indicators provide. They are an aid to, not a substitute for, quality assessment and sound professional judgement.

To assist the judgement of professionals and to address the criteria specified by Oakes, the Quality Assurance Directorate of the New South Wales Department of School Education is developing a system of indicators based on the concept of best practices. These indicators are designed to assist with planning for the improvement of student learning outcomes.

BEST PRACTICES DESCRIPTORS

What are the major dimensions of a school's operation? Within these dimensions, what are the major areas of operation and what aspects define the scope of that area? How would teachers and other practicing professionals describe best practices in that area and what pointers would indicate the best practices were part of a particular school's operation?

This is the task that three writing teams are addressing[1]. Their work is informed by the effective schools literature and is being tested with a wide group of fellow professionals. Descriptors are being developed in three dimensions of schooling.

- Teaching and Learning
- School Governance and Management
- School Leadership and Culture

The indicators will represent what the profession agrees are the parameters for highly effective operation, both at the school and classroom level. This provides one of the challenges in their development, for as Murnane & Raizen, cited in Porter (1991, p. 18) have demonstrated, experts do not always agree on what constitutes good teaching. Practitioners views of best practices may be limited by their own teaching experience and sphere of understanding. However, the writing

---

[1] For an explanation of the process used to form the writing teams and to develop the indicators see Carroll, C. (1993). *The development of best practices descriptors.*

teams have been chosen from a group of persons acknowledged by their peers to be excellent in the application of their craft. The writing teams are constantly testing their work with networks of colleagues and are documenting the research that is being used to support the statements.

The statements being developed, take into account that schools work in different contexts and move through phases of development[2]. The descriptors are "constructs that describe some aspects of educational phenomena that people care about" (Cooley, 1983, p. 8). The dialogue that is occurring while the indicators are being developed has focussed the statements on the fundamental issues associated with best practices in schools and classrooms. Many descriptors have been discarded as the focus has been sharpened. The descriptors specify the "whats" desired or to be achieved, they do not say how to achieve an outcome. Determination of how to achieve an outcome is the professional domain of school based staff.

The indicator statements are written statements that require the application of connoisseurship (see Eisner, 1991) or the application of professional judgements to determine performance level. As Eisner explained, connoisseurship–the art of appreciation–is a means for educators to understand what is occurring in schools and through those understandings improve practice and policy. Eisner defines connoisseurship as "the ability to make fine–grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities" (p. 63). This requires detailed understanding of the context, and that is best known by the practitioners at the local level.

Given that qualitative indicators are meaning laden, they must proffer explicit statements of what is best practice. Hence, associated with each indicator statement is a series of pointers. They point to the best practice and what is observable if the best practice is in operation within the school's context. It is necessary for team members to determine whether or not it is appropriate to expect a particular practice to be present or not in the situation that is being observed. Hence, the observers need to be context sensitive as the "interpretation of such data can never be unequivocal and direct but depends on a communication and on the standpoint of the listener or observer" (Ashworth, 1986, p. 8).

The Framework of Best Practices Descriptors

The framework of the Best Practices Descriptors is shown in Figure 1. The operations of schooling has been defined in terms of practice in three dimensions.

- Teaching and Learning
- Leadership and Culture
- Governance and Management

---

2 For a discussion of development cycle of schools see Cuttance, P. (1993). *Quality systems for the performance development cycle of schools.*

BEST PRACTICES – DESCRIPTOR STATEMENTS

TEACHING & LEARNING	LEADERSHIP & CULTURE	GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT
1. The Learning Environment	*1. Organisation & Management*	*1. Strategic Management*
1.1 Social Context	1.1 Personnel	1.1 Strategic Planning
1.2 Physical Context	1.2 Resources	1.2 Management Planning
1.3 Expectations	1.3 Decision Making	1.3 Implementation
1.4 Student Welfare	1.4 Structure	1.4 Review and Evaluation
2. Student Learning	*2. Symbolic*	*2. Leadership*
2.1 Student Attitudes	2.1 Values and Beliefs	2.1 Vision
2.2 Student Practices	2.2 Mission	2.2 Leadership Roles
2.3 Reflection	2.3 Culture Building	2.3 Development
3. Teaching Practices	*3. Educational*	*3. Decision Making and Communication*
3.1 Teacher Beliefs and Knowledge	3.1 Teaching Practice	3.1 Processes and Structures
3.2 Professional Training and Development	3.2 Student Learning	*4. Students*
3.3 Planning and Implementation	*4. Human*	4.1 Welfare
3.4 Assessment and Reporting	4.1 Personal Attributes	4.2 Recognition and Morale
3.5 Reflection and Evaluation	4.2 Professional Attributes	4.3 Outcomes
	4.3 Scholarship	*5. Staff*
		5.1 Development
		5.2 Training, Development & Welfare
		5.3 The Working Environment
		6. Parents and Community
		6.1 Participation and Involvement
		6.2 Partnerships
		7. Curriculum
		7.1 Responsiveness and Relevance
		7.2 Resources
		7.3 Review and Evaluation
		8. Resources
		8.1 Administration - general
		8.2 Budgeting
		9. External Environment
		9.1 Departmental
		9.2 Wider Community

Figure 1. Best Practices Framework

Within each dimension the writing teams have identified a number of key areas. Each of these areas is divided into several aspects and descriptor statements have

been written for each aspect. Figure 2. illustrates several of the expanded indicator statements from the dimension of Teaching and Learning.

AREA 1: THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	
ASPECTS	**DESCRIPTOR STATEMENTS**
1.1 Social Context	1.1.1 There is a cohesive classroom climate within which all students feel secure. 1.1.2 The teacher values and responds to the experiences, interests and knowledge of all learner groups. 1.1.3 Teaching programs address the diversity of cultures, values and attitudes of students. 1.1.4 Teachers actively support and develop the relationships between the student, teacher, and parent/care giver. 1.1.5 Teachers actively support and develop the relationships between home, school and the community.
AREA 2: STUDENT LEARNING	
ASPECTS	**DESCRIPTOR STATEMENTS**
2. **2.1 Student Attitudes**	2.1.1 Students are enthusiastic about learning and are actively involved in learning experiences. 2.1.2 Students are willing and confident to take risks as part of the learning process. 2.1.3 Students collaboratively engage in making decisions about their own learning. 2.1.4 Students appreciate and respect the needs and rights of others. 2.1.5 Students accept responsibility for their learning. 2.1.6 Students actively seek assistance to facilitate their own learning. 2.1.7 Students strive for personal excellence and demonstrate pride in achievement.

Figure 2. Best Practices Descriptor Statements

Why Best Practices?

A standards approach, as exemplified in the ISO 9000 series or the AS 3900 series of statements, was not adopted. There is a similarity between a standards approach and minimal competencies testing and thus the minimal teaching movement. Best practices are about striving to achieve the ideal, not the satisfaction of an agreed minimum performance, irrespective of the level of that performance.

The practice of certifying against standards leads organisations to comply with them. Hence, over a period of time they become defacto acceptable standards that organisations aspire to. There is no merit or reward in attempting to exceed them. Obviously, "if a person's work is defined by what is required but not necessarily what is best, enthusiasm, initiative, and the commitment to continuous improvement will be lacking" (Porter, 1991, p. 26).

Because the Australian standards outline what is expected from a high performing organisation, the process of auditing against them and accrediting the organisation means that some will not be accredited. For those organisations, this can be seen as failure. The concept of failure that is then engendered in the mindset of these organisations can be anti–development.

Best practices statements being developed by Quality Assurance are predicated on the assumption that there are agreed performance goals to which schools and teachers can aspire. The context in which schools operate means that not all schools are at the same stage on the journey to the goals and it needs to be recognised that there are multiple paths to achieving the same goals. However, the measurement of performance against the goals can clearly indicate the journey that remains. Clearly articulated strategies can then be put in place to continue the improvement process and measurements over time can provide feedback about the success of strategies being implemented.

The Purpose of the Best Practices Statements

The best practices descriptor statements serve four purposes. First, they provide a framework for determining the foci for school reviews. Second, they provide the parameters for professional judgements and debate during school reviews. As such they are the landscape against which school review findings are analysed and against which recommendations are written. Third, the descriptors provide a framework for ongoing debate at the school level. They can be used by schools to assess aspects of their performance and to plan for their ongoing development. Fourth, they provide a basis for assessing the performance of the system. However, the primary purpose is to make explicit the parameters within which school reviews occur.

School Reviews

Once every four years each school in the state undertakes an external school review. A review team works in the school for between two and five days, The time that a team spends at a school is determined by the nature and size of the school.

Teams typically have a membership that includes the host school principal, a local community member, a peer executive member, at least one teacher and a director from the Quality Assurance office who acts as the team leader. The peer executive member and the teacher are seconded to the quality assurance directorate for periods of time that range from one to four school terms. [3]

School reviews have three specific components. The first and major component is the analysis of focus areas identified by the school, the community and the team leader. To identify the foci for each review, the team leader and school community undertake an analysis of the school development plan, available student outcome data and school performance in light of the best practice descriptors. This information is used to identify aspects of the school's operation that would benefit most from detailed review and further development. In essence this analysis assesses four key aspects of performance.[4]

- Factors *enabling* current successful programs.
- Factors *impeding* current performance.
- Key areas for development necessary to meet emergent community needs over the next three to five years.
- The effectiveness of services and programs delivered by other parts of the school system to schools.

As part of the review process a range of data are gathered and analysed. The findings highlight school achievements and identify areas for further development. The review process and the public reports that result from each review acknowledge the strengths and achievements of the school and identify aspects of practice that should be tackled in the quest for ongoing development and improvement in student outcomes. The statements of best practices are to be used as the backdrop for writing the recommendations for ongoing school change and development.

A second facet of the school review process is dedicated to data gathering for system wide program evaluations. In each individual school review data are gathered for only one program evaluation and the school is aware of this focus prior to the review. The data for the program evaluations are aggregated with data from other schools and is used for the preparation of systemic reports. As such it is not specifically fed back to the school community at the time of the school review. The sampling frame for school reviews is such that in any seven weeks of review activity, a stratified five percent sample of the schools in the state are reviewed. This assists with the analysis of program evaluation and best practices data.

The third facet of the school review process is the gathering of best practices data to facilitate judgements about the system's performance.

---

[3] For a fuller explanation of the school review program see Carbines, R. (1993). *Quality assurance–development and accountability through school reviews.*

[4] For a more detailed discussion see Cuttance, P. (1993). *Quality systems for the performance development cycle of schools.*

A Framework for School Development

The statements provide a landscape of expectations against which schools can assess their performance and plan for their ongoing development. As part of this process the statements provide the framework for ongoing educational debate. The descriptors provide schools with collaboratively developed statements of the characteristics of the operation of a highly effective classroom or school. The statements explicitly state the goals to be achieved and provide the subject matter for informed educational debate. The statements supply the information for the first four aspects of Senge's learning organisation.

The use of such statements must be limited, however, by some caveats. They are intended to guide the assessment of school effectiveness only. They should not be used to assess the effectiveness of any individual. However, they can be used by schools themselves to challenge assumptions and organisational myths that are imbeded as part of past operational practice. Given that dramatic change is occurring in educational organisations, many of these myths and folklore that underpin a range of practices in education, need to undergo intense scrutiny.

The statements describe the goals to be achieved rather than a prescriptive path that must be followed. As the Ernst and Young Best Practices Report (1992) graphically indicated, applying the same treatments to all organisations is counter productive. Knowledge of the context and stage of development of any organisation is crucial when planning strategies for ongoing improvement efforts.

Systemic Performance

New South Wales is committed to the introduction of the national profiles through the incorporation of outcomes in each Board of Studies syllabus. This will generate a comprehensive data base of student outcomes. As the outcomes data base expands, the best practices information will be analysed to determine its relationship with student learning. This analysis will in effect identify the various descriptors associated with school and classroom practices that add value to the educational outcomes of students.

At a systemic level the information will illustrate what is happening across the system–it will provide summative data to examine systemic performance.

The judgements made about performance will assist the executive of the system to make decisions about resource allocation, priorities for policy development, training and development required, and initiatives that need to be subjected to a more detailed scrutiny.

Aspects of the system identified as requiring detailed scrutiny will become the focus of system program evaluations. These evaluations will use the school review process to gather data.

Best Practices Data Gathering

One dimension of best practices will be monitored in each review and the school will be aware of the dimension prior to the review. The process of gathering data is integrated with the school review process but in many instances specific data not

acquired as part of the school review will be required. This may necessitate additional classroom or general observation around the school, examinations of specific documents and interviews with staff, students and parents.

Shephard, cited in Cuttance (1992), indicated that the processes of gathering data reflected many of the characteristics of authentic pupil assessment.

- Gathering information against the criteria is judge or observer intensive.
- Sampling is used to reduce overall costs–the system rather than the school is the unit of analysis.
- The process has a less distorting effect on school practices than check lists of practice.
- Both processes and outcomes are observed as part of the review.
- The trade off between depth and breadth of practices observed had to be taken into account in their development.
- The criteria are not meant to provide prescriptive or comprehensive statements of the characteristics that might be associated with all effective practices, rather they describe some of the key characteristics that one would expect to observe in effective teaching and learning situations.

The best practices data used to analyse systemic performance are gathered against a sampling grid so that aggregation will provide the type of information outlined by Oakes (1986). Given the number of schools reviewed each year (approximately 550, which is 25% of the schools in the state), and the number of classrooms visited, it will be possible to extrapolate and report on individual aspects of performance across the system.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Traditionally, system wide program evaluation has been driven by the curriculum implementation process. A new curriculum is introduced and at some stage it is evaluated. The program is publicly known well in advance as is the curriculum cycle. Another stimulus for program evaluations has been the need to look at some intractable problem or some issue that needs political resolution. In many instances these evaluations have been contracted out to external persons or organisations to engender a degree of distance between the evaluator, the findings and the decision makers. In many instances reports were delivered but no action resulted. The reports could disappear into a bureaucratic mud and never see the light of day.

The rate of change and the nature of problems that organisations face means that it is not possible to plan a long range fixed program of evaluations. Systems need to be responsive to changing circumstances. However, the process for determining what gets evaluated is extremely important.

Traditionally it has been the opinions of the service providers that has determined the evaluation agenda. If organisations are attempting to become

flatter and move the decision making closer to the operation front then the traditional approach is not relevant. The central or regionalised service providers exist to assist schools to improve student learning outcomes. The priority for determining what is to be evaluated should therefore be set by the recipients of the services being delivered. They can offer opinions and insights into what assists and impedes them in their daily work of enhancing student outcomes. Hence, the school review reports and the best practices data will be analysed to determine the particular programs that will be evaluated.

SUMMARY

Educators are aware of and are constantly being reminded of the wide ranging changes that are sweeping across our schooling systems. The changes are typified by the increasing demand for accountability. This is occurring at both the local and systemic level of schooling. Society, and especially political parties of all persuasions, are requiring the expected educational outcomes to be clearly stated. Schools and staff are increasingly being held accountable for the achievement of those outcomes. This is happening within an environment of diminishing fiscal resources.

As educators we need to seize the high ground and clearly articulate what we think are the appropriate indicators of school effectiveness for demonstrating the results of our endeavours. It is necessary to move quickly from inputs and processes to a clear focus on outcomes. This will require significant change within our schools. The change required will only be achieved if we establish our schools and our educational system as learning organisations. In this type of school mutual trust is generated so that persons are prepared to risk the initial stresses of initiating change. Teachers have the range of skills required, although they may not always realise it, to undergo the significant learning required to produce major change to the culture underpinning our structures, organisations and the teaching and learning processes that occur in our schools. The best practices descriptors provide a framework for professional debate as they articulate a vision for what is possible. Practitioners at the local level will translate the goals into strategies for the improvement of school organisation and classroom practice to maximise the impact on student learning outcomes.

Best practices indicator statements provide a framework against which to initiate and chart systemic progress. By reporting against these indicators in a public way we can discharge our systemic accountability requirements while at the same time provide information to assist planning, policy generation and resource allocation. The analysis of the indicator information and school review reports will generate a program of evaluations that focuses on the needs of service recipients–practitioners in schools–and addresses issues of concern to them. Further, as a range of relevant student outcomes data becomes more readily available, the best practices data provides a framework for the analysis and identification of school improvement and school effectiveness factors.

REFERENCES

Ainley, J., Goldman. J., & Reed. R. (1990). *Primary schooling in Victoria: A study of students' attitudes and achievements in years 5 and 6 of government primary schools.* (Research monograph No. 37). Hawthorn, Victoria: The Australian Council for Educational Research.

Ashworth, P. (1986). Adequacy of description: The validity of qualitative findings. Sheffield: Sheffield City Polytechnic.

Caldwell, B.J. (1993, September). *Leading the transformation of Australia's schools.* William Walker Memorial Oration presented at Australian Council for Educational Administration National Conference, Adelaide, South Australia.

Cooley, W.W. (1983). Improving the performance of an educational system. *Educational Researcher, 12*(6), 4–12

Cuttance, P. (1992). *Monitoring educational quality through performance indicators for school practice.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

____ (1991). Performance indicators and the management of quality in education. In Hewton, J. (Ed.), *Performance indicators in education: What can they tell us?* (pp. 19–34). Canberra: Publishing Services, Department of Education, Queensland.

Eisner, E.W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* New York: Macmillan

Ernst & Young and American Quality Foundation (1992). *The international quality study: Best practices report.* Victoria: Platypus Oz.

Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change.* London: Cassell.

Hodgkinson, C. (1978). *Towards a philosophy of administration.* London: Basil Blackwell.

Hosford, P.L. (Ed.) (1984). *Using what we know about teaching.* Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kogan, M. (1986). *Educational Accountability: An analytic overview.* London: Hutchinson.

Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (1984). *Teachers, their world, and their work: Implications for school improvement.* Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McGaw, B., Piper, K., Banks, D., & Evans, B. (1992). *Making schools more effective.* Hawthorn: Australian Council for Educational Research.

National Schools Project (1993). *Report of the national external review panel.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1993). *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector.* New York: Penguin.

Paine, J., Turner, P., & Pryke, R. (1992). *Total quality in education.* Gosford: Ashton Scholastic.

Phelan, P., Davidson, A.L., & Cao, H.T. (1992). Speaking up: Students' perspectives on school. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73*(9), 695–704.

Porter, A.C. (1993). School Delivery standards. *Educational Researcher, 22*(5), 24–30.

Rosenholtz, S. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: The social organisation of schools.* New York: Longman.

Rowe, K.J., Holmes–Smith, P., & Hill, P.W. (1993, November). *The link between school effectiveness research, policy and school improvement: Strategies and procedures that make a difference.* Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Perth Western Australia.

Sadler, D.R. (1987). Specifying and promulgating achievement standards. *Oxford Review of Education, 13*(2), 2–13.

Schon, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey–Bass.

Senge, P.M. (1992). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation.* Sydney: Random House

Starratt, R.J. (1993). *The drama of leadership.* London: Falmer Press.